

Hurricane Ike ravaged Galveston, Texas leaving little to remain in the aftermath. However, the 2008 *Coastal Living* Idea House and its host community of Beachtown, prove that well-planned design can weather the worst of storms. >>

standing strong



Beachtown is a New Urbanist project, where the goal is to add value by creating neighborliness through conscious design. Informed by time-tested traditions that evolved before the automobile skewed development priorities, New Urbanist communities are planned as pedestrian-friendly environments that integrate the private realm of homes and the public realm of parks, squares, and streets. Neighborhoods mix different scales and types of residences with amenable retail, offices, and entertainment. So residents, freed from their cars, are more likely to mingle informally in public places, strengthening a sense of community.

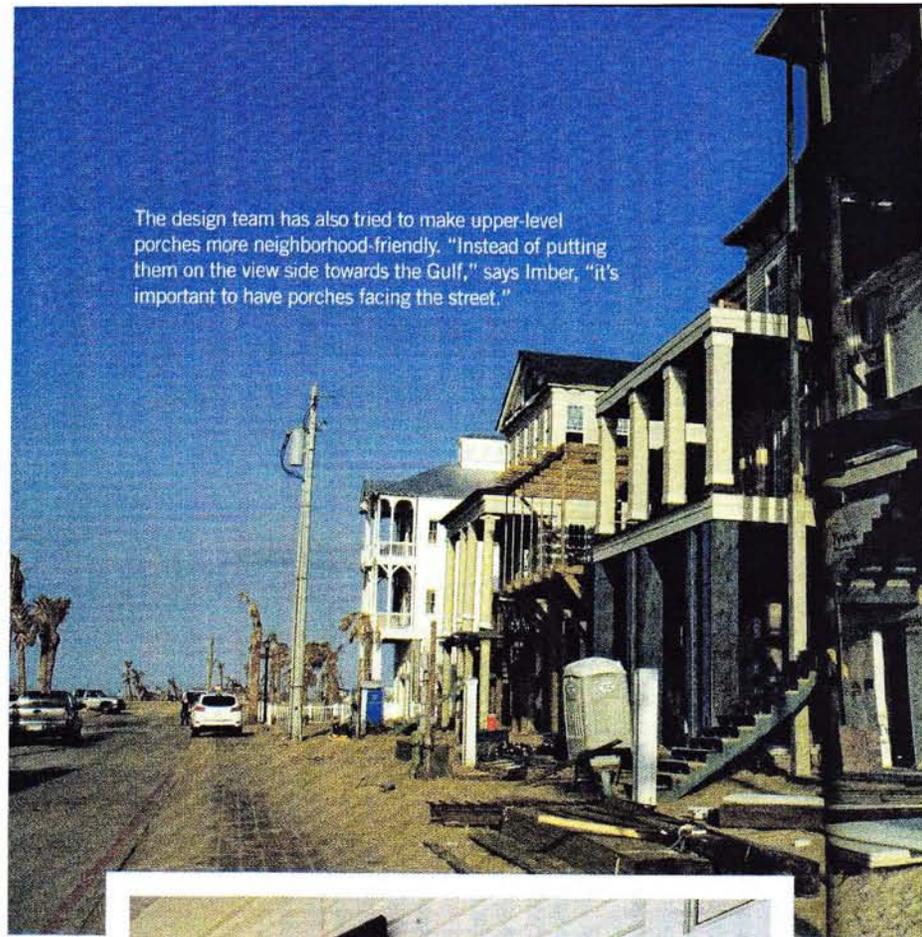
Beachtown enjoys – and is challenged by – its geography. It lies on one of the few accreting beaches in the region, which means that currents and storms deposit sand on its beach instead of eroding it. While that makes it unlikely that storms will wash away foundations, lower levels of structures are nevertheless vulnerable to storm surges and flooding. To satisfy federal flood zone rules and IBHS guidelines, Beachtown homes have “breakaway” lower levels designed to allow storm water to pass through without threatening the integrity of the structures and without invading living levels that might be elevated 20 or more feet above the ground. To the federally mandated base flood elevations in Beachtown, Shirazi added another three feet for safety and to qualify for lower insurance premiums.

That’s a good thing. But a “stilt house” environment, with front doors and porches high above the street, frustrates the goals of pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.

“How,” asks architect Michael Imber, who designed the *Coastal Living* Idea House, “do you create viable communities with houses 23 feet in the air?”

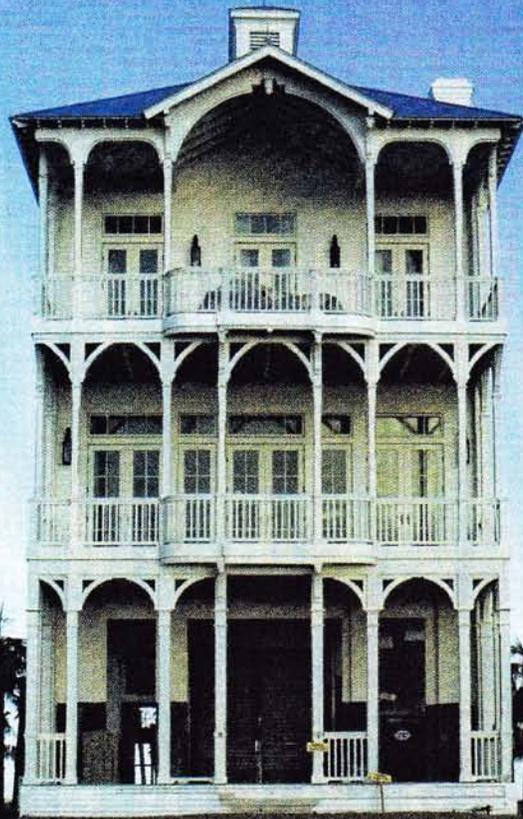
Elevating design standards along with homes

Architect Steve Mouzon led the PlaceMakers consulting team that designed an architectural pattern book for Beachtown. “So far,” he says, “I wouldn’t say we’ve solved the problem, but we’re getting there.”



The design team has also tried to make upper-level porches more neighborhood-friendly. “Instead of putting them on the view side towards the Gulf,” says Imber, “it’s important to have porches facing the street.”





November 6, 2008: The *Coastal Living* Idea House and Beachtown shoreline two months after Hurricane Ike. Opposite: the house from the November 2008 issue.